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Ill. governor warned on ethics bill

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DENVER – Responding to continued rumors that Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich intends to do an end-run around a major ethics package, key Illinois lawmakers gathered in Denver for the Democratic National Convention today warned that the state Legislature would override him to put the plan in place.

At issue is a bill, passed this year, that would prohibit state contracts to political contributors -- “pay to play” politics in the political shorthand of Illinois.

Blagojevich has been hinting for months he wants to use his amendatory veto powers to add new provisions to the bill before he signs it. Critics say that’s a ploy to stall implementation of the bill, because the second-term Democrat has raised millions of campaign dollars through the legal but controversial practice.

Blagojevich has until this weekend to take action on the bill. Rumors have intensified this week that he will alter the bill -- rumors fed in part by the fact that the second-term Democrat hasn’t shown up yet in Denver for the party’s national convention.

Democratic Illinois legislators who traveled to Denver for the presidential nomination of former Springfield colleague Barack Obama reiterated earlier threats that they will override any veto Blagojevich might attempt, which would put the bill into law over his objections.

“We’ve already talked about it: We will override him,” warned state Sen. Debbie Halvorson, D-Chicago Heights. “This has to be signed, as is. . . . We have worked way too long with this.”

Several other Illinois lawmakers who gathered at the Illinois delegation’s morning convention breakfast at the downtown Marriott in Denver issued similar warnings.

“Like it or not, we do have a legislature in Illinois, and he’s going to have to work with us,” said state Rep. John Fritchey, D-Chicago, who spent three years ushering the bill through the Legislature.

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